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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000061

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [GV](#)

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE DE SUIVI TO REPORT TO CONTE THIS WEEK

REF: A. CONAKRY 0050

[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0029

[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0164

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. According to one union leader, the Committee de Suivi will present a summary of its findings to President Conte this week. In addition, the Committee's delegation will present a new restructuring decree and ask that the president sign it. If the president rejects the Committee's recommendations and the decree, contact says the unions will talk about setting a date for a strike. Despite these comments, it is unclear whether the population would back the unions. At the same time, economic pressures continue to mount, contributing to growing popular frustration. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met with Louis M'Bemba Soumah, Secretary General of Guinea's teachers' union (SLECG) and Deputy Director of the Union of Guinean Workers (USTG), on March 31. Although a separate union, SLECG is also a member of the broader USTG union. Dr. Ibrahima Fofana (USTG) and Mme Serah Rabiattou Diallo (CNTG) tend to take the local spotlight with respect to union leadership, but Soumah is an important behind the scenes actor, and an active participant in union negotiations. However, he is widely seen as too outspoken and provocative by his colleagues. Several of them have commented to POL LES that Soumah is too loud during negotiations and does not know when to sit down and be quiet. He is one of the older union leaders and is widely seen as a possible alcoholic. Despite these issues, Soumah is well connected within the unions and privy to extensive negotiations. His colleagues may not necessarily agree with his tactics, but they tend to agree with the underlying principles.

GOING TO SEE THE PRESIDENT

[1](#)3. (C) Soumah said that he had left his colleagues to continue negotiations with Guinea's republican institutions (the National Assembly, the Supreme Court, and the Economic and Social Council) in order to meet with Poloff, but planned to return later. He echoed Rabiattou's comments of last week (reftel A), saying that March 31 was not a deadline for resuming a nationwide labor strike, but rather, a deadline for the Committee de Suivi (reftel B) to complete its review of the January 2007 Accords. Soumah said that the Committee has almost completed its work and he anticipates that a delegation will visit President Conte this week in order to present its report. (COMMENT. Guinee24.com also reported on April 1 that the Committee will see the president. END

COMMENT.)

¶4. (C) According to Soumah, the delegation will present Conte with a draft restructuring decree that will clearly delineate the powers attributed to the prime minister and his cabinet members, and include a provision specifying that the PM holds the right to appoint his cabinet as well as a host of other administrative positions. In addition, Soumah said that the Committee will present a report on its work as well as the various concessions that the parties have tentatively agreed to. "We will ask him to sign the decree," Soumah said, "and for the rest, we will ask him to agree with our recommendations."

¶5. (C) As for the actual delegation, Soumah said that it will be comprised of the heads of all three republican institutions, the Council of Elders, religious leaders, and one or two union representatives. He said that the unions would probably send Rabiadou, although they had not yet agreed. He noted that the choice of Rabiadou is related to the fact that she is a woman and likely to be less threatening to the president. "We are sending a very respectful delegation," Soumah said as he emphasized that the group will include respected elders and religious leaders. "We are sending them in the African way; the elders will tell him that they are coming as his fathers and he must respect them because they will speak the truth."

ALL OR NOTHING

¶6. (C) Poloff asked what would happen if the president refused to sign the new restructuring decree or did not accept the Committee's recommendations. Soumah said that if

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the outcome is positive, there will be no problem, "but if there is any blockage, we will sit down and choose a date for a strike." When Poloff pushed for clarification, Soumah said that the president must agree to sign the decree and fully accept the rest of the proposal.

LOOKING FOR ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS

¶7. (C) With respect to the Committee's specific findings and recommendations, Soumah said that they still want basic problems addressed, such as lack of access to water and electricity, and economic relief. He said that they will ask for rice prices to be "regularized," that exports be suspended for six months in order to bring down local prices, and that certain economic concessions be offered in exchange for fuel price increases. When Poloff stressed that rising commodity prices are a worldwide phenomenon, and that the negative effects have already been felt in neighboring countries, Soumah said that they know the problem is international prices, but the government still needs to offer economic relief.

¶8. (C) At one point, Soumah said that Guinea's prices are grossly inflated, and then later said that the borders have to be closed because people are coming to Guinea to buy goods at lower prices. Poloff said that this kind of thinking effectively goes against every basic economic principle. Soumah agreed, but said that the situation is different for Guinea because "people are hungry." Poloff also pointed out that freezing exports had already been tried under the original January 27 Accords. Soumah said that the government only effectively implemented that policy for two months, and that prices actually went down for that period of time. Soumah repeatedly mentioned the imminent fuel price increases (septel), saying that increased costs for fuel will force up prices on nearly all other goods. "The people will be strangled by the prices," he said.

¶9. (C) Again emphasizing the need for the government to offer economic concessions in exchange for taking away the fuel subsidy program, Soumah said that the unions had met several times with the visiting IMF team and the Ministry of Finance over the past few days in order to discuss possible solutions. According to Soumah, the IMF and Finance agreed that the government could implement reduced transportation fares for certain categories of commuters (such as students), suspend the customs duty on rice imports, and increase stipends for university students. "What we really want is salary increases, but we cannot get that right now because of the IMF program," he said, although he added that everyone had agreed to hold an annual discussion on salaries in order to discuss appropriate increases.

NEED LEGAL CHANGES TOO

¶10. (C) Poloff asked whether the Committee plans to recommend any changes to Guinea's constitution or legal code.

Soumah said that the report will include a specific recommendation to the National Assembly to legally institutionalize the prime minister's position. "I personally told them (the National Assembly) that they have never done their job and now is the time to rehabilitate themselves and do what they were elected to do," Soumah said.

However, Soumah said that any legal changes should be done in consultation with the political parties. Soumah characterized this provision as a "medium-term" goal.

STILL WANT JUSTICE ON MAMADOU SYLLAH

¶11. (C) When asked whether the Committee will address the pending corruption case against Mamadou Syllah, Soumah responded with a resounding yes. He said that the unions understand that the criminal case has been dismissed, but they still expect the case to proceed as a civil case.

MORE WORKERS SWITCHING TO USTG

¶12. (C) In reference to a recently published press interview with Soumah, Poloff asked him about his comments about a growing divide between the USTG and the CNTG. Soumah said that the CNTG is rapidly losing members because they are

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shifting their allegiance to the USTG. According to Soumah, many workers see the CNTG as "too old fashioned" and that it is not accurately representing worker interests. He said that workers have the right to choose which union they want to represent them, which is what is happening. However, he emphasized that Unions-Intersyndicale, as an organization, remains strong, and the CNTG will continue to play its leadership role within that organization.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) The unions are not currently calling for a strike, but they seem to have fairly defined expectations of what should happen over the next few weeks to avoid one. Despite continued threats, it is not clear whether the population would actually support the unions if they do call a strike. Economic frustration continues to mount, especially now that the promised fuel price increases have gone into effect, which could generate popular support. At the same time, people seem to be confused about what they would be striking against. They are frustrated both with Conte and with Kouyate, and there is some sense that a labor strike would be

a public statement of support for one or the other.

¶14. (C) If Conte reacts as he traditionally has when the Committee de Suivi comes to see him, it is likely that he will resist signing the proposed restructuring decree especially if it clearly strengthens the PM's powers at the expense of his own. In the same vein, getting the National Assembly to pass a law institutionalizing the prime minister's position is likely to generate resistance, both within the National Assembly and when it eventually makes its way to the president to be signed into law. On the economic side, many of the unions' demands are illogical. When Soumah was talking about prices in Guinea, he repeatedly contradicted himself, and what he was saying did not make sense. His comments were very similar to those of Fofana's just a few weeks ago (reftel C), suggesting that the unions do not have a good understanding of the fundamental economic problems facing the country. END COMMENT.
CARTER